

## Despair and Hope--Chapter Six

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Disclaimer located in the Prologue.

Reacting quickly, Rose ducked down into the water, immersing herself from neck down. Red hot anger stabbed Rose's cheeks when the man merely laughed at her reaction. "I demand to know who you are and what you mean by this!" As she said this, she inched forward, attempting to get a better view of him.

Then she stopped, the color draining from her face. The man, against the bright silhouette, looked just like . . . Jack. But how . . . ? No--He was taller than Jack, bigger built, and looked older. \*John,\* she realized as a fresh cloud of anger and a sigh relief rushed through her all at once.

"I'm so sorry," he was gasping through his intolerable laughter. "I couldn't resist! My sister said you'd be here--" He cut himself off as his body doubled over in a fit of hysteria.

\*Couldn't resist, huh? Well, let him have his laughter. \* How exactly would he react to this?--Raising her nose up in dignity, Rose waded toward the bank, appreciating the shocked look that registered on John's face when she emerged herself completely from the water. \*Who's laughing now?\* Rose restrained herself from saying this as she

stepped around him, droplets of water sliding from her bare body to land on his boots. Rose had to make an effort to keep herself from giggling at the priceless look on his face. His eyes looked as if they were about to bulge from his head. Rose stopped in front of him, placing her hands on her hips in annoyance.

She cleared her throat impatiently, drawing his attention away from her body.

"Huh?" he asked, meeting her eyes with confusion.

"My clothes, please?" she asked, a wry smile plastered on her face.

"Oh! Sorry." He handed her clothes hastily, his head lowered in what seemed to be embarrassment--or was it shame?

"Thank you," she said sweetly, turning away to walk towards the nearest tree.

He did indeed look like Jack, she mused as she slipped her loose clothes back on--his eyes, his smile, his laugh, and even his hands--all like Jack's. She grinned. His reaction to her body. After pulling her clothes back on--it was quite difficult with the patches of water that stubbornly clung to her body--she stepped out from behind the tree to find John Dawson sitting cross-legged on the ground.

"Well, Mr. Dawson?" she asked, looking down on him, "do you have something to say for yourself?"

He grinned up at her sheepishly. "I already said I was sorry."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself--spying on a lady like that."

He muttered something under his breath that Rose could not quite make out.

"Pardon me?" she asked.

"I said," he responded unnecessarily loud, "it was worth it."

Rose studied him carefully. He did indeed look like Jack, but Jack had never been so obnoxious, no matter how rude he might have seemed at first. "You're being very rude," she said carefully, cheeks once again turning crimson. "I was your brother's wife," she said firmly, now beginning to believe the lie herself. "The least you could do is show some respect."

John had gone eerily quiet, the color having drained from his face. For once, this strange, obnoxious man whom looked so much like Jack, was speechless. "Excuse me," she said quietly, turning away.

As she walked away, she pondered over the alien emotions this man had made her feel. She had actually flirted with him, but then he had made her angry. "He may look like Jack," she muttered to herself, "but he's not."

\* \* \*

Rose sat quietly in the solace of the late afternoon. The view of the afternoon sky was breathtaking from the front porch of the Dawson home. The setting sun was now casting those beautiful colors onto the clouds. It was her time of the day--the time that she sat watching the sunset in all it's glory, imagining herself riding into its eternal depths with her arms wide open. And Jack was there, holding close to her firmly, telling her to trust him.

"I trust you," Rose whispered aloud, falling into the daydream. Quietly, she began to hum the tune of the song that had become theirs and theirs alone--the song that would always remind her of his voice and of sailing through the light of the setting sun.

This had become a ritual for Rose since the first day after the sinking. She would sit every afternoon until the sun was completely gone, being replaced by the jewels of the heavens. And with those stars would come painful memories that she would just as soon forget. That's when she would leave--standing up to turn her back on the heavens.

But this night, Rose was interrupted from her ritual.

"I loved my brother."

Startled, Rose turned her head, one red tress blowing loosely in the soft breeze. There he stood, leaning casually against the doorframe. His arms were crossed, eyes upturned to the stars that were just visible through the navy curtain of the sky.

In the pale light of the stars, Rose was once again startled by his resemblance to Jack--the way Jack looked the night they had met. When he pulled her back over.

"I don't don't doubt that," she said simply, looking away from him, embarrassed that she had been caught staring.

"Don't you? Is that not what you implied?"

She turned to him sharply, blue eyes glaring daggers. "Asking to show respect to your brother's widow does not imply that I believe you did not care for him."

John stepped out of the doorway, moving next to her to lean against the railing. "And about that--how do we know you are really who you say you are? Jack never wrote to tell us he got married. Some strange girl who walks and talks like one of those rich snobberies shows up at our door claiming to be the widow of our dead brother."

Rose looked away from him then, turning her eyes to those stars that she had so desperately tried to avoid in the past. "Why would I lie? And what reason would you have to be skeptical?"

He regarded her profile carefully. "I'm not sure, but something's not right here."

Rose avoided meeting his gaze, preferring the torturous stars.

"What did he say to you about me?" he asked when she would not look

at him.

"He said nothing. About any of you." And now it was her turn to regard him. "I gathered that it was painful for him to speak of his family."

"He never said anything at all? How long could you possibly have known him?"

With that, he turned back towards the house. He paused momentarily in the doorway. "But just so you'll know, I did love him. We did not always . . . agree on things, but he was my brother."

She did not turn to look at him as he disappeared inside the cottage. Her eyes remained transfixed on the stars. \*What happened here, Jack?\* she asked quietly into the void.

But on this night, her only reply was the cooling breeze of the night, chilling her, causing her to shiver. She wished desperately Jack were there to comfort her.

Continued in Chapter Seven.

End  
file.